CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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FINAL RECORD OF THE EIGHT HUNDRED AND SEVENTY-SECOND PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 27 March 2001, at 10.15 a.m.

President: Mr. Hu Xiaodi (China)

GE.01-61067 (E)

The PRESIDENT (translated from Chinese): I declare open the 872nd plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

I have on my list of speakers for today the representatives of Egypt and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. I give the floor first to the representative of Egypt, Ambassador Fayza Aboulnaga.

Ms. ABOULNAGA (Egypt) (translated from Arabic): First of all, Mr. President, I would like to congratulate you on assuming the presidency of the Conference and I am confident that your effective guidance will help the Conference to start its substantive work, after a long period of inaction, if not in the first part of this year's session then early in its second part. I would like on this occasion to assure you of the full cooperation of the delegation of Egypt and to offer my best wishes for success in your difficult task.

I would also like to thank your predecessors, Ambassadors Christopher Westdal of Canada and Ambassador Juan Enrique Vega of Chile, for their energetic and creative presidencies and, as this is the first time that I take the floor before the Conference officially since their arrival, extend a warm welcome to our new colleagues Ambassadors Eui-Yong Chung of the Republic of Korea, Samir al-Nima of Iraq, Amina Mohamed of Kenya and Rajmah Hussein of Malaysia. The arrival of two new ladies in our midst will help to remedy the Conference's current gender imbalance. I would also like to pay tribute to Mr. Vladimir Petrovsky, the Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, and to welcome the Deputy Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament, Ambassador Enrique Román-Morey. I would also like to thank the members of the Secretariat for their dedication to the work of the Conference.

Mr. President, I cannot but express my delegation's profound misgivings over the state of paralysis that the Conference on Disarmament has been suffering from for at least two full sessions. At a time when the peoples of the world yearn for effective steps in each and every area of the disarmament agenda, our Conference is still unable even to agree upon its programme of work. It has been argued that the present situation of the Conference on Disarmament merely reflects the state of international relations. But it was precisely in this same state of international relations that the 2000 NPT Review Conference managed to achieve historical success based upon an ambitious programme for the total elimination of nuclear weapons with both international and regional dimensions.

The unequivocal and unconditional undertaking by the nuclear-weapon States to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenal had been universally hailed as a long awaited announcement of their intention to comply with their unambiguous legal obligations under article 6 of the NPT. It is a step that came in response to the appeal of billions of people around the world, to the message delivered loud and clear by non-governmental organizations, and to the voice of reason reflected in the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice

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which unambiguously declared that there exists an international obligation to pursue in good faith and bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under strict and effective international control.

So, at last, the nuclear-weapon States have made a commitment. This step should not be underestimated. However, promises are meant to be kept. The billions of our people in every continent have no use for empty words. The call in the Final Document of the sixth NPT Review Conference for the establishment of an appropriate subsidiary body in the Conference on Disarmament with a mandate to deal with nuclear disarmament can only be interpreted in the light of this unequivocal undertaking by the nuclear-weapon States. Reason dictates that it is now time to establish an ad hoc committee to negotiate on nuclear disarmament with the objective of eliminating every nuclear weapon in the world.

A number of proposals have been tabled at previous sessions for the mandate of such an ad hoc committee and successive presidents of the Conference, the Group of 21, and a number of delegations have tabled specific drafts. Egypt has also submitted a number of proposals for a possible mandate for this ad hoc committee, the most recent of which was included in document CD/1563 dated 26 January 1999. Nevertheless, we have consistently demonstrated great flexibility in responding constructively to the various proposals in this regard, most recently by accepting the proposal by Ambassador Amorim, the then President of the Conference on Disarmament, contained in CD/1624, as a basis for consultations on the programme of work. But flexibility must be reciprocated. What is essential is that effective progress be achieved. The cause of nuclear disarmament is too important to be relegated to the domain of lip service.

It is impossible to deny our profound disappointment that the commitments made in the NPT Review Conference are yet to be translated into specific actions. It is, however, a sign of some progress that there is consensus in the Conference on Disarmament, for the first time, that nuclear disarmament should be dealt with in an ad hoc committee with a substantive mandate.

Egypt believes that such an ad hoc committee should deal with specific measures and practical steps for nuclear disarmament, including those called for in the Final Document of the sixth NPT Review Conference. It should also deal with the various aspects of a prospective legal regime for the total elimination of nuclear weapons, including the verification aspects central to such a regime.

In parallel with our efforts to address nuclear disarmament within the Conference on Disarmament, we should redouble our efforts in the wider international context. In addition to the numerous resolutions adopted by international and regional organizations, President Muhammad Hosni Mubarak has called for an international conference to rid the world of nuclear weapons. This call has been adopted in different forms by different international forums. It was taken up by Mr. Kofi Annan, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, in his call for an international conference on eliminating nuclear dangers, a call that was also adopted by the Millennium Summit, the largest assembly of heads of State and Government in history.

(Ms. Aboulnaga, Egypt)

In view of the current impasse in the Conference on Disarmament, the convening of an international conference on nuclear disarmament is quickly becoming a matter of the utmost urgency.

Egypt considers transparency with regard to weapons of mass destruction, especially nuclear weapons and their related technologies, an important confidence-building measure. At the fifty-third and fifty-fourth sessions of the First Committee of the General Assembly, Egypt introduced a draft resolution on transparency in armaments, which was adopted by the Assembly in both sessions, in order to highlight the need for a parallel approach that would make transparency comprehensive in all fields of armaments. We felt no need to reintroduce this resolution at the fifty-fifth session, since the approach that it espoused has been firmly established.

We therefore welcome consideration of the different aspects of transparency in armaments during the 2001 session of the Conference on Disarmament, including the establishment of an ad hoc committee on this subject, which would naturally have a comprehensive mandate. While Egypt lays strong emphasis on the goal of nuclear disarmament at the global level, we are especially alarmed at the current situation in the Middle East, which requires immediate action. In this regard, the initiative adopted by Egypt and Iran since 1974 to establish a nuclear-weapons-free zone in the Middle East and the initiative of President Mubarak to create a zone free of all weapons of mass destruction in the region have received the overwhelming support of the international community. This was reflected in countless resolutions adopted by the United Nations General Assembly and other international and regional forums. The Final Document of the sixth NPT Review Conference was unambiguous in reaffirming "the importance of Israel's accession to the NPT and the placement of all its nuclear facilities under comprehensive IAEA safeguards, in realizing the goal of universal adherence to the Treaty in the Middle East".

In view of the above and in the light of General Assembly resolution 55/36, entitled "The risk of nuclear proliferation in the Middle East", which was adopted by an overwhelming majority, and resolution 55/30, entitled "Establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the region of the Middle East", which was adopted without a vote, the delegation of Egypt requests UNIDIR to prepare a study on practical steps for the immediate creation of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East as an action-oriented follow-up to the study that the Institute prepared in 1996 on the creation of a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the region and also building upon other work previously undertaken by UNIDIR in this regard.

Egypt's support for the re-establishment of an ad hoc committee under item 1 of the agenda, entitled "Cessation of the nuclear arms race and nuclear disarmament", to conduct negotiations on a convention to prohibit the production of fissile materials for weapons or other explosive devices falls within the context of a programme of work which includes all the major issues of the agenda. In this regard, the establishment of this ad hoc committee under item 1 of the agenda, entitled "Cessation of the nuclear arms race and nuclear disarmament", firmly indicates that the objectives of the desired treaty are not limited to non-proliferation aims but include substantive nuclear disarmament objectives as well.

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For such a convention to achieve its goals, it should include substantive and practical measures for nuclear disarmament. Its scope should therefore include all fissile materials potentially usable in the manufacturing of nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices across the world, including military stocks. Any international instrument arrived at must be non-discriminatory; in other words a unified regime for strict international verification must be applied to all States and to all facilities capable of producing fissile materials, with no exception.

Such a treaty must also be internationally and effectively verifiable. This means that the international instrument to be negotiated must be based upon the element of absolute transparency which, of course, implies that all facilities that are involved around the world in the process of production or storage of the fissile materials must be subject to a strict regime of supervision and verification. In short, the entire nuclear fuel cycle must be placed under such an international regime. It will also be essential to create or develop a foolproof regime to spot any undeclared nuclear installations or undeclared stocks of fissile materials.

Any potential treaty or convention to prohibit the production of fissile materials cannot imply any degree of international de jure or de facto recognition or acceptance for the possession of nuclear weapons by any State not party to the NPT or for the indefinite possession of nuclear weapons by the five nuclear-weapon States specified in the NPT. Such a treaty should not in any way give the impression that there is international acceptance of such possession.

On the contrary, the international legal instrument to be negotiated should unambiguously and clearly call upon all States to join the NPT. It should also underscore the necessity of the achievement of the objective of total elimination of nuclear weapons, as stipulated in article VI of the NPT treaty, within a predictable time-frame.

The value of such a treaty depends on its early entry into force. Egypt was among the first States to call for the announcement of a collective commitment or a series of unilateral voluntary commitments by all States which operate nuclear facilities to implement an immediate moratorium on the production of all weapons-grade fissile materials. This call has gained widespread international support, since such a step would positively influence the coming negotiations and demonstrate the earnest commitment of all the parties concerned to the substance of these negotiations.

General Assembly resolution 55/32, which is one of a series of resolutions presented by Egypt every year in rotation with Sri Lanka in the First Committee, calls upon all States, in particular those with major space capabilities, to contribute actively to the objective of the peaceful use of outer space and the prevention of an arms race in outer space and to refrain from actions contrary to that objective. This resolution also invites the Conference on Disarmament to complete the examination and updating of the mandate of the ad hoc committee on the subject and to re-establish it as early as possible during the 2001 session. This is clearly with a view to conducting negotiations for the conclusion of a multilateral agreement or agreements on the prevention of an arms race in outer space in all its aspects.

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In this regard, we believe that there is a need to build upon the extensive work already undertaken in the Conference on Disarmament in previous years and speedily move towards the re-establishment of an ad hoc committee to negotiate this issue. What is required is to prevent a costly and destructive arms race before it starts. If we do not succeed in acting with determination now, we will stand helplessly in the face of dangerous technological developments with the potential to introduce new military paradigms, and thereby pose a serious threat to the security and stability of all societies. Egypt therefore supports the commencement of negotiations as soon as possible on a comprehensive regime to prevent the use of outer space for all military purposes. Outer space should be used exclusively for peaceful purposes.

Mr. President, while supporting your efforts to reach an agreement on the programme of work, I would like to emphasize the importance of the other important elements in such a programme, namely negative security assurances, transparency in armaments and anti-personnel landmines. I need not repeat here our positions on these issues as they are adequately recorded in the proceedings of the Conference on Disarmament.

It is also important to note that the substantive work of the Conference is still held behind closed doors in an anachronistic manner to a large extent lacking in the transparency that we demand in all other forums. We should therefore not neglect the three important substantive organizational aspects that will ultimately help to improve the performance of this Conference, namely, the expansion of membership, a review of the agenda and the improved and effective functioning of the Conference on Disarmament.

Within this context, the active participation of civil society has now become a sign of our times. The Conference on Disarmament may be one of the last forums in the world in which a limited number of delegations still resist any role for civil society and non-governmental organizations. In fact, non-governmental organizations have the potential to help in reviving the work of the Conference in more ways than one. I therefore emphasize that the voice of non-governmental organizations should be heard in the plenary meetings of the Conference on Disarmament. This is, in our opinion, a key element in improving the functioning of the Conference and rendering it more effective.

Mr. President, I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate Egypt's total commitment to work earnestly and diligently towards the achievement of the objectives of general and complete disarmament, which require maintenance of the minimum defence requirements and the elimination of all weapons of mass destruction, especially nuclear weapons, in accordance with the priorities adopted by the international community at the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, in 1978.

Finally, I would like to express our sincere hope that the Conference on Disarmament in its 2001 session will live up to its responsibilities as the sole multilateral forum for global disarmament negotiations. I need only recall in this regard the message of the Secretary-General of the United Nations at the opening of this 2001 session conveyed to us by Mr. Vladimir Petrovsky, in which he reminded us that the representative membership of this body puts it in the unique and privileged position of negotiating outcomes that could be truly

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universally adhered to and effectively implemented. The delegation of Egypt sincerely hopes that we possess the collective wisdom needed to take advantage of the rapidly narrowing window of opportunity that is still available to us, given the present international strategic situation, before this opportunity vanishes for a long time to come.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Chinese): I thank the representative of Egypt for her statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to the representative of the United Kingdom, Mr. Ian Donaldson.

Mr. DONALDSON (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland): Mr. President, let me begin by congratulating you on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference. The delegation of the United Kingdom offers you its full support and cooperation in your work.

I have asked for the floor today very briefly to inform the Conference that on 27 February 2001 the United Kingdom ratified Protocols I and II of the Treaty of Pelindaba, the treaty which established an African nuclear-weapon-free zone. The United Kingdom's decision to ratify the Protocols to the Treaty clearly demonstrates our support for a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Africa. It underlines our commitment to nuclear non-proliferation and our wish to see a world free of all weapons of mass destruction.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Chinese): I thank the representative of the United Kingdom for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair.

At this point, I would like to make a brief statement in my capacity as President.

Today's is the last plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament during the first part of the 2001 session and is also my second plenary meeting as President. After this week the Conference will enter a six-week mid-session break. It is my intention today to undertake a brief review of matters of relevance that have occurred over this part of the session and, at the same time, to report to you all on the consultations that I have had with all parties since becoming President.

As you all know, the Conference has been at an impasse for some time now, being unable to arrive at consensus on its programme of work, and everyone is displeased and anxious. To break the deadlock, my predecessors, in particular Ambassadors Westdal and Vega, strove tirelessly and explored boldly; the zeal and diplomatic wisdom which they displayed are manifest to all. Although they were unable to attain the consensus on the programme of work which we have so long sought, a number of options that may advance the cause of the Conference have emerged thanks to their efforts and the joint efforts of all delegations.

Since becoming President one week ago, I have held consultations on the Conference's programme of work and related questions with all the group coordinators and with colleagues from a dozen or so delegations, based on the work done by my predecessors and the principle of fairness, impartiality and openness.

(The President)

The consultations have shown that, on the matter of the work programme, the basic points of divergence persist and are essentially reflected in the mandate as regards the important issues - namely, should it negotiate on these matters, should it pursue negotiations as an end in themselves or should it discuss these matters? The divergent views on this question and the deadlock are undoubtedly related to the prevailing international security situation and differing strategic considerations. In this regard, it is the common understanding of all sides that the Conference on Disarmament recognizes the support for document CD/1624 as a basis for further intensified consultations and efforts are continuing to find possible solutions.

With regard to complementary actions, my consultations have also revealed notable divergences of opinion. According to some, based on the Conference's rules of procedure and document CD/1036, there are a number of courses of action that may be explored. According to others, consensus on the choice of any complementary action is still a long way off in view of a number of basic considerations. Nevertheless, appropriate efforts are also continuing in this regard.

Distinguished colleagues, as your President, I shall continue to cooperate sincerely with all sides, as I stated at our plenary meeting last Thursday, objectively reflecting and transmitting everybody's positions and suggestions. I would like to reiterate my hope here that every delegation and group will constructively put forward ideas, devise different methods and propose suggestions, consulting widely both with me and among the various countries and groups in a collective effort to promote the work of the Conference on Disarmament.

I shall be in Geneva during the first, fourth, fifth and sixth weeks of the mid-session period; for the second and third weeks, I shall be in New York to attend the UNDC meeting. I shall stay in touch with all parties so as to gather their opinions and reactions in preparation for the opening of the second part of our session.

Distinguished colleagues, this concludes our business for today and, therefore, the last plenary meeting of the first part of the 2001 session. The next plenary meeting of the Conference will be held on Thursday, 17 May 2001, at 10 a.m.

The meeting rose at 10.50 a.m.